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Kissinger Seen Aiming Toward A Comeback

Is Henry A. Kissinger, the self-styled lonesome cowboy of Richard M. Nixon's foreign policy, riding the comeback trail? Some Reagan administration officials say he is, and they're not pleased at the prospect.

As a protege of the late Nelson A. Rockefeller, Kissinger was regarded with open hostility by President Reagan and his conservative backers. The dedicated anti-communists around Reagan saw Kissinger, the principal architect of detente with the Soviet Union, as the personification of what was wrong with American foreign policy.

In fact, no one could have been further out in the political wilderness than Kissinger seemed to be when Reagan took over.

Besides the ideological differences, there was personal animus. The president's national security affairs adviser, Richard V. Allen, had no love for Kissinger, who had fired him from the Nixon administration.

Even Alexander M. Haig Jr., who studied high-level intrigue at Kissinger's knee in the Nixon White House, was careful to keep at arm's length from his old boss, at least in public. White House sources insist that Haig kept in touch with Kissinger, but always on the Q.T.

Aside from the obvious risk of seeming to be close to Kissinger in the Reagan era, the sources said Haig was also deeply suspicious of the man who never made any secret of his lust for power. Haig reportedly worried that Kissinger wanted his old job back.

But the situation has changed dramatically since then. Both Allen and Haig are gone, replaced by two men with little experience in foreign policy: William P. Clark at the National Security Council and George P. Shultz at the State Department.

Shultz is not only an old friend of Kissinger from the Nixon days, but he's not the type to worry about Kissinger's ambitions.

The result is that, while Kissinger hasn't exactly been invited back into the State Department bunkhouse, he has at least been tying up his horse at the hitching post. In fact, Shultz has been quite open about his reliance on Kissinger and has invited him for weekend huddles on the Middle East.

"Shultz doesn't know many things about foreign policy," an administration source told my associate Lucette Lagnado. He added a bit sourly that the secretary's dependence on Kissinger is "a product of built-in incompetence."

Exactly how much influence Kissinger has had on Shultz—and on his old critics in the Oval Office—is impossible to pinpoint, of course. But some see Kissinger's hand in Reagan's September peace initiative for the Middle East.

Sources say Kissinger has been meeting secretly with various Middle East officials to push the peace plan, and has also spoken with Reagan's chief shuttle diplomat, Philip C. Habib.

Those who dread the resurrection of Kissinger point to other associates in the foreign-policy establishment: Undersecretary of State Lawrence S. Eagleburger, Assistant Secretary of State Thomas O. Enders and Robert McFarlane, Clark's deputy at the National Security Council.

Other old Kissinger buddies who are close to the administration, if not officially part of it, include Helmut Sonnenfeld, William Hyland and Brent Scowcroft.

Kissinger, observed one administration source, "is everywhere—and very influential."

Opinions vary on the question of Kissinger's ultimate hopes. Most Kissinger-watchers assume he's working up brownie points against the day George Bush may need a secretary of state.

Meanwhile, Kissinger is reportedly raking in big consulting fees at Kissinger Associates, as much for the entree he can give clients to those with power in Washington as for any foreign-policy expertise.